

Amendments to the Claims:

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

Best Available Copy

Claims 1-23 (canceled)

Claim 24 (new): A method of producing a protein of interest, comprising:  
providing a *Lactococcus lactis* bacterial strain, wherein the *htrA* gene has been mutated  
so that said strain does not express a functional HtrA protease;  
introducing into said bacterial strain a nucleic acid having a sequence encoding a protein  
of interest operably linked to a promoter; and  
culturing the bacterial strain under conditions causing expression of the protein from the  
nucleic acid;  
recovering said protein exported by said strain in the culture medium.

Claim 25 (new): A method according to claim 24, wherein the bacterial strain also does  
not express a functional PrtP protease.

Claim 26 (new): A *Lactococcus lactis* bacterial strain, wherein the *htrA* gene has been  
mutated so that said strain does not express a functional HtrA protease, and wherein said strain  
comprises an expression cassette having a sequence encoding a protein of interest operably  
linked to a promoter.

Claim 27 (new): A bacterial strain according to claim 26, wherein the strain also does  
not express a functional PrtP protease.

Claim 28 (new): A method of producing a fermented product, comprising:  
culturing a bacterial strain according to claim 26 with a fermentation substrate under conditions  
suitable to produce a fermented product.